

Azure Flame

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Summary: Chapter 6 On her way to Kalay to meet her resurrected father, Kierra is attacked by a mysterious stranger who is almost as skilled at Mars Psynergy as she is...but when she finds out her father's true identity, can she handle the truth?

***Chapter 1*: Prologue**

DISCLAIMER: I don't own Golden Sun or any of its characters, ne? Except for Kierra. She's my own character. Don't want to own the others, either, except maybe for Saturos... Al! Bluebell! Get away from the keyboard! *grabs the keyboard and holds it away from Saturos who is trying to get at it, pushing him away with her foot* I'm makin' this fic and there's nothing you can do about!! GEROFF ME!

~::~~

My name is Kierra. That should be all you need to know, for now.

But, then again, my name alone doesn't tell you anything about me, does it? I didn't think so. That is why we have titles.

I am known as Kierra the Blood-eyed; the Arrogant; the Powerful.

I am called the Blood-eyed because my eyes are a light amethyst flecked with red, which, of course, gives the impression of blood. I am called the Arrogant because...well, I admit, that is what I am. At times. And I am the Powerful because I am the strongest Mars Adept alive.

Well, except for my father. But let's not go there. For now.

Oh, yes, and I forgot another title: Royal Guardian of Tolbi. Former. But not anymore. Now that you know a little bit about me, let me tell you a bit more of my background information.

I am seventeen years old. I have light, brown-reddish hair—except for a single strand that is pure white. It used to be a light blue when I was younger, but it has been getting whiter ever since...now, it'll still give off a blue flash when the sunlight hits it. I was raised in the town of Tolbi. All I know was that I was brought up by Lord Iodem, and that I was an orphan. He didn't raise me to be royalty, however. I was raised to be a warrior, and he has trained me well. He never kept the truth from me once, never hid from me that I was adopted from the outskirts of Tolbi. I admire him for that.

Yet...he had not the slightest clue as to who my parents were. Neither did I.

But, still, it didn't really matter to me. That is, until that one fateful day in which everything changed. Everything.

I was at my normal post, outside the gates of Tolbi. I was alone. I needed no allies to keep out intruders. I had possessed an incredible knack at Mars Psynergy since I was an infant. There wasn't really anything to do. I leaned back against the wall, sighing. I set down a double-pointed javelin that I'd always used for combat and for training. I looked around, not seeing anybody for miles. Usually, the only time people came was around Colosso; I'd had enough experience with that, thank you very much. There were far too many agitated tourists trying to get in for me to handle. It was far too stressful. Plus, I'd seen it enough times already. To me, it was just boring, watching gladiators fight each other like wild beasts. They didn't really put any strategy or finesse in it at all. It was just "kill the other guy with the biggest weapon". It was plain to see who would win after they ran the obstacle course; if you got the worst weapon, you lost. Plain and simple.

Yet...I'd heard that a long time ago, when Lord Babi was still alive, there was one person who entered Colosso without going through the trials and won. *And he used Psynergy.*

I wished I'd been there to see it.

But, interrupting my thoughts, a shadow crossed the ground. I snapped up immediately, grabbed my javelin, and stood in a warrior's stance. It was a young man, still much older than me, with blond hair and a wooden staff. What I noticed most about him, though, was that he was staring at me in disbelief.

"*Jenna?* Is...is that *you?*"

***Chapter 2*: Kierra's Departure**

DISCLAIMER: I STILL don't own Golden Sun. Or the characters, EXCEPT for Kierra, who is my own character. Although...

"GIVE ME THAT KEYBOARD!"

No way! Back off!

Note: Whenever you see a little tilde thingie—that's this: ~—then that means I'm changing POV's. Comprenez vous? (Yes, I know that's two different languages.)

~::~~

I stared. Sure, I hadn't known Jenna as well as Isaac did, but she still looked like the Jenna I saw when I was reading his mind, so long ago. But, then again, so many years had passed since then...she was far too young. Only then did I notice a peculiar white streak in her hair.

"State your name and business," she growled, still holding that javelin.

"Uh, my name is Ivan, and I don't want any trouble," I responded.

"State your business," she said again through clenched teeth.

"Look, I was just passing by...who are you?"

"That's for me to know and for you to find out, blondie."

I sighed, then got an idea. "Fine. I'll gladly find out."

~

He closed his eyes. *What is he doing?* I thought. Then I saw an aura build around him. Just like when I...

He was using Psynergy! He was going to attack!

~

My thoughts were interrupted when I was smashed into the ground. Next thing I knew, she was on top of me, holding that javelin barely inches away from my throat. "What was that for?!"

"For trying to attack a Tolbi Guardian," she hissed.

"I wasn't going to—"

"Oh, *sure* you weren't."

I panicked. Here was a seventeen year-old girl threatening to kill me. As if my life could be any worse. But then...

"Kierra! Who is that?"

I recognized that voice. But who...

She suddenly had a startled look on her face and leapt up.

"Lord Iodem, he was about to attack."

"I was not!" I yelled angrily. Then I recognized the voice.

"*Iodem?!?*"

"Ivan? Is that you?"

"Yeah!" I tried to advance, but the girl—I think her name was Kierra—swung the javelin in my path, blocking me. She glared at me.

"Kierra, that's enough. I know this young man."

She hesitated, then muttered, "Yes, Lord Iodem..."

He nodded. "Very well. Come, Ivan."

Soon, I was being led into the palace. "What happened to Babi?" I asked.

"Oh, the poor fellow...he died long ago, of old age." He sighed. "Since he didn't have any heirs to the throne, I became king."

"Ah...and who was that?"

"Who, Kierra?"

"Yeah. Is that your daughter?"

He laughed. "Oh, no, of course not. She's too young and I'm too old. She showed up a long, long time ago. Poor girl was an orphan, barely a year old. I raised her to fight, and she became the Royal Guardian of Tolbi. I daresay she gave you quite a handful, no?" He laughed again.

"Er...yes..." I couldn't stop thinking about how much she looked like Jenna. And that white streak, too...it almost looked blue. And she knew I was using Psynergy... "Is she an Adept?"

"Oh, yes. An extremely powerful Mars Adept. She can hold her own against a small army."

"Wow."

"Yes, I know..."

I thought on how to say this. "Erm...you know...she *does* look an awful lot like a woman from Vale...when she was younger."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes. Her name is Jenna. And since you just said that Kierra was an orphan..."

His eyes widened. "You don't think..."

"I do."

"But...Vale...that's so far away from here."

"Well, Jenna is also a Mars Adept."

"I see..."

"You think that maybe I could take her back to Vale with me and...you know...ask around?"

He thought a moment. "Well...I don't suppose it could do us much harm...I mean, there isn't really anything in Tolbi to honestly protect since Colosso is over for this year."

I nodded. "Very well then."

"But, let me go tell her...I very much doubt she'll be able to trust you."

~

I sighed, with, yet again, nothing to do. That guy—Ivan—wasn't *too* boring, but then Lord Iodem came and said "he was to be trusted." I growled. He was going to *attack* me, damn it. Couldn't Iodem see that?

Then again, in my position, it might've seemed as if I was the attacker.

Damn.

I could hear someone coming up behind me. I turned around. It was Iodem. I sighed again. "What is it, my Lord?"

"You have nothing to do, right?"

I nodded warily.

"I mean, you yourself have complained of nothing to guard, necessarily..."

"And?"

"Well...have you ever heard of a village up north, called Vale?"

"No."

"Ah. I didn't think so. I was just wondering—"

"Does this have anything to do with that Ivan?" I asked quickly.

He paused. Maybe I was a bit *too* fast. "Er...yes..."

"I know where this is going. Ivan is going up to Vale, and since I have nothing to do, I might as well go with him. Is that right?"

He looked startled. Why should he? I was always good at this type of thing. "Er...yes, every word."

"You must think I'm crazy. There's no *way* I'm going."

"And why not?"

"Because...I have to guard the city. That should be obvious."

"Ah, but you just said you have nothing to do here."

Oops. "But...he tried to *attack* me!"

"Kierra..."

I couldn't think of any more reasons. "Oh, fine!"

"I knew you'd understand," he beamed. "Ivan is ready to leave. How about you?"

Well, all I really needed was my javelin. "Yeah. ...Wait, are you suggesting we leave *immediately?!?*"

"Well, not if you don't want to."

I knew that tone. Even though he said I had a choice, I really didn't. "All right."

"Good. It'll be quicker if you cross the Karagol, but if you—"

"Yeah! I mean, uh, yes." I nodded. I sounded a bit *too* eager, I guess. But I was. I knew that the Karagol was an inland sea, but I'd never been on a ship before.

"Very well then. I'll go get Ivan."

~::~~

After we got off the ship, I noticed that Kierra looked slightly disoriented. "You okay?" I asked.

"I'm fine," she said, then glared at me. "We're walking on the way back, you hear me?"

"Relax, you won't have to worry about that for a while."

"What?"

"It's a bit far off to Vale. Don't worry, though, it's not too long. We can stop in Kalay, if you want."

She nodded weakly. "Fine..."

~

I'd never been to Kalay. Sure, I'd heard of it—who lived in Tolbi that didn't? But I'd still never been outside of Tolbi.

We stayed at the Kalay docks first. They'd built an inn there a few years back. There, I heard the innkeeper muttering something about Alchemy. I don't know why I noticed it, but I could feel a warm breeze sting my face and I just...*noticed*. "Excuse me?" I asked.

"What?"

"Well...what were you saying?"

He looked at me oddly. "Oh, nothin'..." He looked at the building where they sold tickets and sighed. "You know what used to be there?"

"Uh...no." *A house.*

What? I thought I heard a voice in my mind. That's not right...

"A house. There lived just about the nicest family you ever did see, but..."

"But what?"

"There was a fire. Killed all but one, their kid. And he had an odd little crystal, which gave him powers...strange powers..."

"Like what?"

"He was immune to fire, for one. That was why he survived, I guess. But he could also attack with it."

Psynergy, I thought.

"A few days after the fire, he just walked out of the village... was never seen again. What makes the story strange, though, is that basically the same thing happened up in Bilibin, with a little girl, about the kid's age."

"What were their names?"

"Chris and Sarah. She disappeared without a trace, too."

"Ah...I see." Interesting story. But why did I want to listen to it, anyway? I sighed. Some things I would never figure out... "How long ago did this happen?"

He thought. "About...twenty-four years ago."

"Ah. Okay." *Then it doesn't concern me*, I thought.

It does. More than you could ever imagine.

It was that voice again. It wasn't my own; it was male, and commanding. It sent shivers down my spine. But why?

~::~~

Note: The thingie with the two kids disappearing doesn't really become a major plot thingie until MUCH much later... but the same doesn't go for the crystal thingie. ^_^

"You must really like the word 'thingie'..."

More than you could ever imagine, Bluebell. ^_^ Oh, yes, and please review. It's just a friendly reminder that some of us are still ALIVE.

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

Maybe I'll tell you as soon as you wipe that look off your face and get your friggin' mind out of the gutter.

"Yes, Seru-chan..."

***Chapter 3*: Home...Again?**

Eep! Sorry it took so frickin' long to get the frickin' third chapter out!! At the very least I don't have to rewrite anything, because my frickin' hard drive crashed, deleting EVERYTHING...including what I had of the RD2 prologue... ;_;
Oh well. Somebody just poke me with a stick next time I start slacking off...no, not you Tempest... - -()

DISCLAIMER: Yet again, and as always, I don't own Golden Sun or any of the characters except for Kierra...and Lise. I couldn't remember anybody from Vault except Ivan that had names, so I made her up. *shrugs* She's just an extra. And Saturos is now my unofficial Muse. Happy day. ^_^

~::~~

"I hope you don't mind if we stop in Vault," Ivan said, glancing over at me. "It's been ages since I last saw my folks."

"Sure, I don't mind," I replied. *Anything to make this trip a bit longer...*

"Great," he said, grinning. "The kids are going to *love* you."

Kids? Uh oh...

[A/N: I am in NO WAY insinuating that Ivan had kids, I'm referring to all the OTHER snotty brats in Vault...]

*

"Hey, Ivan! Where've you been?"

"Oh, hey, Lise." I smiled at the sight of the tall, blond girl. She was about five years younger than I was, but she was still taller than me, or anyone else in Vault, for that matter. "I've been hanging around Vale, mostly."

"Why?" Then, she added suspiciously, "Are you chasing after that Mercury Adept, Mia?"

"What? No! No, of course not..." [A/N: What? I LIKE non-canon couples! ...And stop glaring at me like that. Saturos, before I stuff a Hail Prism down yer throat.]

"You sure?"

"Yes!" I sighed. "Kierra and I were just passing through..."

"Kierra?" She blinked. "Oh! You mean that girl who's playing with Tommy and Carla?"

"Uh-huh," I said, looking back at the trio, who were playing tag.

*

"*GIVE THAT BACK!*"

"Heehee! Silly girl!"

"AAAAAAARRRRRRRGH!!"

*

Lise grinned. "Awwww, look how cute they are together!"

I cringed at the thought of how Kierra would react if she ever heard anyone call her 'cute'. "Yeah, you sure got that right..."

*

"HEY! NO! DON'T TOUCH THAT!"

"Okay!"

CRASH!

"ARRRGH!" Did I mention I hate kids?!

...

"We're going...straight...to Vale," an exhausted Kierra asked me about an hour later, "right?"

"Yep."

"Ugh..."

Something didn't seem right, though. Every other time I came to Vale, I noticed a mountain range on my right. But now it was on my left...or had I never noticed it before? Hmmm...

"Are you sure...we're going...the right way?"

"Yeah, trust me."

*

I trusted him about as far as I could sling a piano.

[A/N: First person to guess which book/movie I got that from gets a cookie!]

"Absolutely sure?"

"Yes. Now, quit worrying."

I would've quit worrying ages ago if I weren't worried about five-year-old kids snapping my only weapon in half...

Suddenly, we came to a halt outside of what seemed like a fortress, only the gates were open. Even so, it didn't seem like a friendly place. Ivan paled. "Uh...oh..."

"'Uh oh'? Whaddaya mean, 'uh oh'?!"

He swallowed nervously as he turned to look at me. "This... this is Lunpa..."

"Yeah, so?"

"...We went way too far east..."

I felt like I could strangle him. "**WHAT?!**"

He cringed. "Please don't hurt me."

I growled and turned to storm off, when I saw someone blocking my way. I growled again, a bit louder this time. "Go. Away."

"Hey, why the rush, babe?"

That hit me. I looked up to glare at the guy, who was grinning at me as though he'd won the Tolbi lottery. "You *really* don't want to make me mad."

"Oh really? How come?"

Ivan stretched out an arm in front of me protectively. "Back off."

"Why don't you just stay out of this?" He smirked, then turned to me. "Now let's get back to business."

I started moving my hand over to my javelin. Luckily, the demon children hadn't broken it. "Trust me, you do *not* want to make me mad."

"Yeah? Why not, vixen?"

Then I totally snapped.

*

Before I could say or do anything, she whipped out her javelin and smashed the poor guy over the head with it. Then, before he could cry out, she smashed him in the side of the head again, then on the other side before kicking him in the chest, leaving him completely winded. "Kierra! Calm down!"

"*ERUPTION!*"

He never had a chance.

*

The next thing I knew, the jerk was a twisted, charred, black form on the ground and I was shaking uncontrollably. "That *idiot!*"

"Kierra! We need to get out of here!"

"Why?!" I snapped.

"Just look over there!" He pointed back at Lunpa, where my little explosion was beginning to draw a crowd.

"What happened?!"

"Who are they?"

"In Sol's name...is he DEAD?!"

"Somebody get the Sacred Elder!"

I blinked. "Uh..."

"Get the idea?" Ivan asked. It was a rhetorical question.

"Right. Let's get out of here."

...

Another hour later, I was still shaking like a leaf on a tree. I hissed lowly at the thought of that jerk. Then I saw another village that didn't have a gate or high walls around it, or anything. I assumed that this was Vale. I saw a boy about twelve years old with auburn hair hanging around outside the entrance. Auburn...just like mine! Well, without the white streak, of course. But it was obvious he didn't have any hint of white—or blue—on his hair. His eyes were also a dark brown. They widened at the sight of us, and he straightened up. "Ivan?"

"Hey, Matt! Didja miss me?"

But he wasn't looking at Ivan. He was looking at me. "Who's that?"

"This is Kierra," he said, backing up a little to introduce me.

"Kierra, this is Matt. I do believe that you two have something in common...or a lot of things in common."

Matt blinked and cocked his head. "What do you mean by that?"

"Well...I am assuming, of course, that, ah...you two may well be siblings."

His last sentence took a few seconds to dig in. Then...
"WHAT?!"

"Well, come on, it IS a possibility...isn't it?"

"Uh..." Then I realized that I had ended up at Tolbi as an orphan. In other words, I had no idea who my parents were. And Matt *did* look just like me. Well, except for the eyes, of course. And the white streak, can't forget that. But otherwise...there *was* no difference, except in age and gender. It suddenly became an all too real possibility.

"No. Way."

"Yes, way, Matt," said Ivan, breaking the silence. "She's an orphan." Matt stood staring off into space for a few seconds, then suddenly bolted off in the other direction. "I advise you follow him, Kierra..."

I didn't need a second thought. I dashed off right after him, until we came to a house. He ran right in, then dragged a woman out who I presumed to be his—my—mother. "All right, all right, Matt, what is it?" Then she stopped at the sight of me. Her jaw literally dropped. "Who...who are you?"

I swallowed nervously. "Kierra...of Tolbi..."

I thought that the 'of Tolbi' bit might've warded her off, but she didn't change her expression. Then she let out a strangled gasp and hugged me, tight, sobbing into my shoulder. Then another person came out; a man with flaming red hair, who I presumed to be my father. "Jenna? Jenna, what is it? Who's that?"

Matt spoke for her. "Dad...meet your daughter, Kierra."

His eyes widened. "No..."

He nodded. "Yeah. Kierra, this is Gareth."

What I noticed the most, however, was the fact that Gareth looked *nothing* like me. Oh well. It was probably just a coincidence. But there were still a couple of mysteries.

Where did that white streak in my hair come from? And *why* didn't I look anything like my father?

~::~~

321: That's not all, folks! ^_^

Kitsune: That seemed like a pretty canon couple...

321: I know. ^_^

Saturos: *glares at Kitsune, then turns to 321* Can I have my dignity back yet?

321: No.

Saturos: ;_;

***Chapter 4*: Sparring and Lectures**

Greeeeaat. Just great. The MS Word on this computer doesn't let me save anything in HTML format, so now I have to type things in MS Works Word Processor. Oh, rapture. ... *growls and snatches a large stick away from Kitsune* Stoppit! Now! Yer gonna leave a freakin' bruise on me arm!

"But that's the point!"

...You have three seconds before I superglue you to Xellos, you hear me? Three...two...o—oh, there he goes. ^_^

DISCLAIMER: Still don't own Golden Sun. Nope. Saturos is still my Muse, though. ^_^ If anybody has a problem with it, I have a few immortal Anubis Warriors who might want to have a little chat with ye to work things out, ne?

~::~~

"Kierra! Wait up!"

I turned around to see Matt following me. I sighed. "Can't you just stay back in Vale?"

"Why?" he said quizzically.

"Because you might get hurt."

"I know a little Psynergy..."

"Oh, fine." I was going just on the outskirts of Vale to train. I hadn't seen a single monster on the way to the village...in fact, the only time I ever used my Psynergy on the trek was when that jerk confronted me at Lunpa. Of course, Matt had

spotted me and just *had* to tag along. Not that I minded. It was just that Gareth held me responsible for him.

Why didn't I call him father, you ask? Because I still didn't believe it. We weren't anything alike. True, he was arrogant, as I sometimes have a tendency to be...but he was rather thickheaded at times. We didn't even look alike; it was obvious that I had inherited most of my looks from Jenna, but not Gareth. I often wondered about it.

When I decided we were far away enough, I stopped and looked around, drawing my javelin. Matt stayed back; smart kid. Then I spotted a quick flash of blue. A Vermin. Excellent.

Then it came out of nowhere, practically flying at me. I easily deflected its flight with a quick snap of the javelin, sending it crashing to the ground. Not wanting to waste any Psynergy on the weak animal just yet, I rammed the javelin into its stomach. It gave out a shriek and disappeared. I smirked and waited for the next challenger.

"D'you have anything for me?" Matt asked cheerily.

"Wha...what? What do you mean by that?"

"You know, like a weapon or something. Do you?"

"No," I said bitterly. "I travel light. Besides, didn't you say you knew Psynergy?"

"Only a little," he said earnestly. "Please?"

"I already said no."

"Why not—look out!"

I heard the last part louder than the first. I quickly whipped around, the javelin crashing into whatever was there. Then I saw it was a Thunder Lizard. "Oh gods...Matt, get back..."

"Why? He doesn't look so strong..."

"Get back!"

Merely seconds after I shouted the command to him, the creature whipped its tail out, knocking me down. I landed roughly on the javelin, but quickly rolled over just in time to kick the Lizard square in the chest, preventing it from slicing me in half. It hissed lowly, then leaped at me again, preparing its own Thunder Blessing attack. [A/N: That IS what it's called...right?] But before it could do so, a thin wave of fire slammed into it, distracting it. My mind registered the fact that it was Matt who did that, but I didn't care at the moment because the Lizard was back up. Before I could summon any Psynergy to attack with, it let loose its Thunder Blessing. I braced myself for the attack...when a large curtain of white flames struck out like a lance, shielding me and turning the attack back on the creature. Then I gathered enough energy to rush at the dazed Thunder Lizard and seal its fate with a single stroke of the javelin. When it disappeared, I suddenly felt drained. I wasn't wounded except for a long scar on my leg where its tail hit me, but it felt as though the white fire was coursing throughout my entire body instead of blood. Then it occurred to me to make sure that Matt was okay.

"I'm fine," he called out weakly. I turned my head to where he was. He seemed a little shaken up, but was perfectly fine other than that. "Wait...your hair..."

"What about it?" I snapped.

"It's...blue. Not all of it, just that white part."

I took the single lock of white hair in my hand. It felt searing hot to the touch. Yet, I noticed something—it was a deep, sapphire blue. The darkest I'd ever seen it was a light azure color...oh well. Figuring that was probably enough training for the day, I stood up, using the javelin as a support, and walked back to Vale.

...

I ended up being in the sanctum. Jenna, upon seeing the scar on my leg, insisted that I go. It only occurred to me that I could ask Isaac to heal it instead as I walked in the door; of course it was too late then.

While I was waiting for the Sacred Elder—apparently, some moron who couldn't use Psynergy was downed in battle with a *Vermin*—I thought about the Thunder Lizard. I'd only seen one once or twice; at times, Iodem made journeys to Lalivero and requested that I come with. All the times I'd seen one, though, they'd been fairly small and easy to defeat. That one was the largest I'd ever seen. Where did it come from...?

My thoughts were cut short as the Sacred Elder walked up to me, sighing. "Honestly, you would think that any fool would be smart enough to run away instead of trying to fight it barehanded...huh. What seems to be the trouble, Kierra?"

"Fell in a ravine," I lied quickly. I didn't want to alarm anyone...but I felt bad for it a few minutes later.

"Really? Oh, well, this doesn't look so bad..." He closed his eyes, waving his hand briefly over the scar. Being an Adept, I saw a small aura of golden Psynergy close the wound. It was as good as new.

"Sol's contest season, I hear," he said as I started to walk out the door.

"What?" I said. I stopped at his voice. Sol's contest? What was that?

"Sol's contest. Ever heard of it?"

"No..."

"Ah. I see. Sol's contest is sort of a test of strength, stamina, and intelligence that only goes on at certain times of the year...of course, it's impossible for anyone to compete."

"Why?"

"First of all, the supposed entrance to the grounds is up at Sol Sanctum. It's forbidden to go up there. Second, even if you *could* get to Sol Sanctum, the entrance is hidden. No one has found it yet, I don't think."

"Why is it forbidden to go up there?"

"My, you ask a lot." He chuckled. "Nothing can be done about it, I suppose. Oh well. You see, about twenty-one years ago—long before Gareth married your mother—somethi—"

"Wait, wait. You didn't call him my father...does that mean...?"

"Yes. Ah...your real father...is dead."

I shrugged. "Oh well. I never knew him, anyway, it doesn't really matter all that much to me..." But it still meant that Matt was a half-brother. Did he know that? No, he couldn't have...could he?

"Anyway...twenty-one years ago, your mother, Isaac, Gareth, and Kraden all managed to get past the guards to get to Sol Sanctum because they suspected two people were going to

steal something from the Sanctum. And they were right. However, it resulted in Kraden and Jenna being kidnapped, and three of the Elemental Stars were stolen; Isaac and Garet managed to keep the fourth one, the Mars Star." I nodded; I'd heard of the Elemental Stars. "It was three years before the other three Elemental Stars, Kraden, and Jenna were recovered. But then, Jenna disappeared off to somewhere for a few days...then came back. It was quickly forgotten, but she still won't say why she left."

"Who were they?" I asked. "I mean, the thieves."

He furrowed his brows in thought. "I think...yes. There were two Mars Adepts, a Mercury, and a Venus. The Mars Adepts were Saturos and Menardi, the Mercury was Alex, and the Venus was, coincidentally, your uncle."

"Felix?!"

"Yes. Of course, he was just part of their group. He never *did* anything, really. He joined up with Saturos and Menardi after they saved his life when the Aleph Boulder fell."

"When was that?"

"Twenty-four years ago. The boulder killed Jenna's mother and father, and Isaac's father. Everybody thought Felix was dead until he showed up at Sol Sanctum."

"Ah...um, wait, if you *do* win Sol's contest...what's the prize?"

"Well, uh... One wish, I think. If the gods see it worthy, of course."

One wish? That sounded so cliché. "...Oh. I see. Well, thanks."

"Any time," he called after me as I walked out the door. Then I looked up at Mt. Aleph. Honestly, what was the big deal about going up there? It wasn't as if I wanted to steal the Elemental Stars all over again; I didn't have any use for them. All I wanted to do was to check out this so-called 'Sol's contest', and see what it was all about. There wasn't anything wrong with that, was there? No, there couldn't be. Luckily, the guards weren't on duty at the time. Lucky, lucky me.

Chapter 5: Sol's Contest

DISCLAIMER: No, I did NOT accumulate enough money to buy Golden Sun since the last time I posted a chapter. - -() What more do you want?!

~::~~

As soon as I got into Sol Sanctum, I took a quick look around. Just some long corridors and stepping stones. It seemed as though the strongest security around here was outside. It was easy to find my way around. Then I found myself in another corridor—with a dead end. I groaned. This was it?! I couldn't believe it! I got excited for nothing! This was so incredibly *stupid*.

But, just as I turned back to leave, I remembered that the Sacred Elder wasn't known for telling lies. I looked back. Just some statues...or maybe...well, it was worth a try. I tried pushing one statue, but it didn't budge. Then I tried two more; neither did they. So, maybe it *was* all for nothing. I growled and kicked one in anger.

It rocked ever so slightly.

Now very much alarmed, I tried to move that one. It moved away easily to reveal yet another labyrinth of corridors. Unlike before, however, it was a lot harder to find my way through this one. I ended up going in circles at least three times. When I finally made it to the door, I discovered even *more* statues. Argh. After finally figuring out how to move these, I got through to find a shorter corridor. What was up with all these corridors?! Well, then again, it *was* a temple, so... Anyway, as soon as I walked through the door, there was a room with a statue in each corner and a glowing

image of Luna in the center. There was another door off to the right, and when I went through that one, it was the exact same thing, except that the image was of Sol this time. And—big surprise—there was yet *another* door. Doors, statues, and corridors seemed to be all this place was made of. ... Well, not literally, but it did make for an interesting mental picture. I walked through this one and saw still another door around the corner. If I saw any more doors, I was probably going to go postal. When I went up through this one—it had stairs—I saw yet another corridor, and even more statues. *I am NOT going to set this place on fire, I am NOT going to set this place on fire...* I sighed slowly. I went through yet another door to the left and discovered two statues shining some sort of light on this platform, revealing a rather large hole I didn't notice downstairs. There was also another statue that was larger than the other two, holding up a large disc-thingie...that seemed large enough to fit perfectly into the hole. Of course, it might've seemed a little bigger...but it was worth a try. Though it was large, I found that I could push it easily. Of course, it still took a while to get it to the hole.

But then, as I neared the hole, I began to think, *Why am I doing this, exactly? It doesn't make any sense.* I bit my lip. What did this have to do with Sol's contest? I already saw it as a dead end. Maybe the reason nobody could compete was that it didn't really exist. Who knows? Frustrated, I walked away, trying to think up an excuse for going up to Sol Sanctum.

However, as soon as I left the statue, it must've been on an inclined plane of some sort, because then it started to slide toward the hole itself.

CRASH!

I flinched as the statue dropped like a stone through the hole, the only thing supporting it being the large disc, which seemed relatively weak at this point. I went slowly back down the stairs, back into the room that had Sol in it. When I went through the other door, however, I noticed a difference—there was yet one more door that was glowing. Yes, glowing. It didn't make any sense. Had I inadvertently opened this one up by making the statue fall through the hole? That didn't make any sense, either. Since I figured that the guards just might not be exactly *happy* to see me come out of Sol Sanctum, it wouldn't hurt to go through this one.

However, I discovered that when I approached it, I was teleported to...someplace else. It seemed as though it was night out...where was I?? I could also see the ocean, black as night also. But when I looked around...I saw the Elemental Stars! This was impossible! Had I reached the grounds for Sol's contest?! Must have. I drew my javelin cautiously, waiting for something to happen. Which it did. I could hear a soft growl behind me and saw what looked like a Mercury Djinn. "Damn!" I cursed out loud. Then it leaped at me. I easily deflected it with the javelin, then sprang forward to kill it quickly, which, of course, didn't happen as it fired at jet of water at me. "ACKPTH!! YOU STUPID THING!! DIE!!" It sprang up fairly easily, then fired another stream of water, which I dodged this time. I retaliated with Psynergy. "*Eruption!*" It was flung up in the air with the attack, then I speared it onto my javelin. Or tried to. As soon as the very tip of it touched the djinn, it disappeared. Then I waited cautiously for the next challenge. It wasn't any harder to beat than the Thunder Lizard.

There was a roar behind me. I whipped around to see a giant flaming beast that seemed to resemble a cat, almost. It growled softly, then leaped at me. I ducked quickly, raking it with the javelin. It landed easily on the other side of me,

then turned around and attacked with a long chain of fire. The white fire that had protected during the fight with the Lizard again snaked out, protecting me from the red flame. It growled, slightly discouraged, then pounced on me once again. I rammed the javelin into its shoulder, but either it didn't notice or didn't care, because it didn't disappear. It slashed at me; it would've near taken my head off if I hadn't rolled over in time. This was one of the few times where I was truly afraid.

It tried slashing at me again and I had to roll over again in order to keep it from ripping my head off, keeping my eyes tightly shut. However, I felt an acid-hot, burning substance on my neck and cheek that wasn't fire...but there was little difference. When I opened my eyes, I found that by rolling over, I had slashed the creature right on the neck with my javelin. The fiery substance was its own blood. It seemed to flicker once, then disappeared altogether.

I scrambled back up, trembling. Was this what Sol's contest was all about? Risking your life for one lousy *wish*? I had to get out of here. I could take angry guards, but not what else they were going to throw at me. But, as I looked at the door that led me here, it seemed miles away. *How am I going to get out of here...?*

Then I could feel a breeze on my neck. What seemed a second later, I thought I felt knives being pressed into my shoulders. I screamed out, more in fear than pain, and something screamed back. I looked up and saw a giant white bird carrying me off. I whipped the javelin around and slashed it across the chest, which seemed to do next to nothing. Then it tossed me angrily against the floor. As soon as all the pretty colors went away, my shoulders were throbbing in pain and I realized that it hadn't actually punctured them, or else I'd be bleeding to death. Then it

flapped its wings once, creating a giant whirlwind—which was heading straight for me!

I quickly scrambled out of the way, but it followed. I got up. "*Heat Wave!*" The fire, however, added to the whirlwind, turning it into a giant *flaming* whirlwind. As if my day could get any worse. But then it quickly flickered and died out. I sighed in relief, but then I saw the white bird hurtling at me. It slammed into me, nearly pushing me over the edge of the stone platform that I was on, into the sea. Then the white fire circled around it and the bird shot back, screeching. Not missing a beat, I attacked again with Eruption. It outflowed the attack, however, and summoned another cyclone to finish me off. The white fire lashed out once again and the cyclone disappeared, leaving the bird wide open for an attack.

However, the white fire circled around me, then seemed to, well, *attach* itself to my arms. Then I could feel an even stronger attack waiting.

"DELTA FLARE!"

The attack completely engulfed the bird, destroying it. When I was casting the Psynergy attack, though...it didn't seem *entirely* mine. I shuddered slightly, but the white flames still licked around my arms in a thin spiral. I wondered what could possibly be doing this...a spirit? Maybe...

I considered my opponents. The first one was a Mercury Djinn...and then the second one was a big flaming beast. The last one was a giant bird. There must be a pattern of some sort...I tried remembering the Djinn summons. The Mercury Djinn must've represented the Mercury spirit, the weakest Mercury summon, requiring one Mercury Djinni. The beast must've been Kirin, which needed two Mars Djinn.

Then the bird had to be Procne, which needed three Jupiter Djinn. So far, the only Djinn type that hadn't been mentioned was Venus...and since the number of Djinn kept going up with each summon...the only one left was Judgment. Hoo boy.

As if on cue, the summon appeared in front of me, gathering energy in the lion's head cannon. "Uh...oh..." I looked to the portal that brought me here in the first place and considered running for it.

Why run? Fire and earth have a strong relationship with each other...

I paused. The voice wasn't mine, and it sure as hell didn't belong to the spirit threatening to kill me. Then I considered what it was saying. Could the spirit thingy actually be giving me strength, without its knowing of it...? I glanced at the white fire, still circling my arm. It was worth a shot... I drew my javelin.

That's when it fired. I just barely managed to get out of the way, but I could feel the heat of the blast singe my left arm. I glanced back. The blast still kept going, illuminating the Jupiter Star. Then I turned back to the knight. All of my prior confidence immediately left me. It looked like it was waiting for me to attack, though. *Right, then...* "Delta Flare!!"

The attack engulfed Judgment, but didn't seem to affect him at all. Then it drew a rather large sword. Then it charged. I tried to strike it with my javelin, but it just bounced off its armor. *I'm gonna die. I know it. I'm gonna die.*

However, when it swung the sword at me, the white fire again lashed out and onto the blade. It didn't appear that Judgment would be using it again...it just tossed the sword aside and charged up the cannon again. That's when I

realized one of its weaknesses. I jammed the javelin directly into the cannon, twisted it, and pulled it out again. It beat its wings and probably would've yelled out in pain, but it didn't. I noticed that the tip of the javelin was covered in black blood. It tried flying back, but I threw the javelin at it. It hit its mark—right in the center of the visor. It flailed about for a second, then pulled it out with its good hand, and tossed it at my feet. Now, more blood covered the visor as well as the javelin. Was it blind? Hopefully.

But it still wasn't dead. I was hoping that last attack would finish it off, but apparently, it only made it even *more* pissed off. I could sense another Psynergy attack coming; one even stronger than the Delta Flare. But, again, it didn't quite seem entirely mine...

"OMEGA FLAME!! "

This time, a pure white flame swallowed up the summon... but it still wasn't dead. Just weak enough so that one more attack could easily finish it off. I picked up the javelin and charged, ramming it into the cuirass. Surprisingly, it punctured the armor. Judgment froze up, then flickered once and disappeared. Because I'd been leaning on the javelin, I fell forward. "...ow." I rolled over and looked up at the sky... or was it a ceiling? I didn't know and I didn't care. I just wondered whether or not it was over.

I wasn't aware of how much strength I'd used up. I felt suddenly exhausted. That's when I fainted.

...

I don't know how long it was before I woke up. All I know was that I was still in the chamber, and there was a silver-haired woman in long, black robes. I bolted up, aware that she was

a goddess of some sort. She smiled. "Lay down, child," she said. "No need."

"For what...? And who are you?"

"Ruun, goddess of the moon. I congratulate you. You are the first person who has ever entered Sol's contest and won, let alone lived to tell the tale. And since you knew about this in the first place, I guess you must know the prize, as well. Choose wisely."

I thought. There were a *lot* of things I could've wished for; but at the time, I couldn't really think of anything. Except for one thing.

"I wish to have my father resurrected."

"...You *have* chosen wisely. It is worthy. So be it." She paused. "And...I guess, under the circumstances of the wish, you should have this, as well."

A small blue crystal on a silver cord materialized in the air in front of me. Curious, I grabbed it. "What is it?"

"The Azure Flame. It is one of the strongest objects of Alchemy, alongside the Stone of Sages and the Rose Dagger. I warn you, though; it is not an ornamental object. It is a potentially *very* dangerous item, and can easily destroy you. You must be very careful with it. If it sees fit, it *will* kill you."

"If it...sees fit?"

"Yes. If it sees you as unworthy, or if you use it for the wrong purposes. So far, all the bearers of the Azure Flame have died because of it...except for the last one, who destroyed it before it could destroy him."

"Who was he?"

"Your father."

I didn't quite know what to say to that. "Does that mean...he was still alive in the first place...?"

"No. He was killed."

"Oh."

"Now, you must hurry. Your mother is getting worried."

"Right." I slipped the Azure Flame over my head and dashed to the portal.

"Good luck!" I heard her call after me. "Your father is outside of Kalay!!"

Oh, great. This is going to be a bit more complicated than I thought. I bolted down the corridors and was about to go straight out the door when I was aware the guards might not like it if they discovered I'd been up to Sol Sanctum. Oh well, I'd just defeated the strongest Venus summon; a few disgruntled guards should be easy. Still, I didn't want to risk angering the Sacred Healer. I slipped out and saw that the guards were asleep. Oy. I quietly snuck past them and back into my house.

"So, where've you been?"

I froze, startled. It was Matt. I turned to face him. "Uh...after I got healed, I decided to go train some more." I prayed that he would fall for it.

"What?! And you didn't bring me?!"

I sighed in relief, slightly, so he wouldn't notice. "I didn't want to risk you getting hurt again."

"But that was just *one* Thunder Lizard!! You should've at least *told* me!! I would've brought my own weapon!"

"What, a butter knife?"

"Oh, knock it off..."

"By the way...where's mom and...er, and dad?" *Kalay*, I answered silently. Of course, I was talking about Gareth, so...

"Visiting Isaac."

"Oh. Okay." Now I had to think of a good excuse for going to Kalay. Hrm...maybe I could just say that Iodem missed me and wanted to meet me there? It was worth a shot. Of course, I had to wait until mom and Gareth came back.

"What's that?"

"Huh?" Then I realized he was talking about the Azure Flame. "Oh, this? Just a weird crystal I found. I decided to pocket it."

"Cool...I wonder how much it'll go for in the shop!"

"I'm not selling it, Matt."

"Aw, why not?"

"Because...uh...I doubt it'll be worth anything. Anyway, there's no way in hell I'm selling it."

"Please?"

"No! ...And don't you *dare* think of stealing it!!"

"All right, I give."

I sighed. "Good." I didn't want to think of what it might do to him if he stole it...or, rather, what it might do to me.

~::~~

Yes, I KNOW it's been ages since I last posted a chapter to Azure Flame...I was on the verge of abandoning it, but then I decided not to. Why? Because I still felt a need to torture Smurfy... ^_^

***Chapter 6*: Resurrected**

DISCLAIMER: I still don't own Golden Sun. I'm practically broke, FYI.

~::~~

I was walking to Kalay on my own. Isaac had offered to go with me, but I refused. I could perfectly handle my own. Besides, I didn't want him to figure out how I got the Azure Flame. I didn't know how he would react, but I was sure he wouldn't exactly be happy...

It was a nice day. Some part of my mind told me to hurry, but another said to just slow down. Which, of course, I did. I sighed. I hadn't been attacked by any monsters. Either that, or they just ignored me. Or I ignored them. I never really found out why. Still, I didn't have to go through any fights... so far...

"Flare Storm!"

I barely managed to get out of the way in time before the attack hurtled at me with a deadly force. I snarled and immediately whipped around, drawing my javelin. I just barely managed to see that my attacker was disguised by a heavy, black cloak which overshadowed his face...why was he wearing something like *that* in this heat?! It wasn't like he was anywhere near Imil, or anything!

"Who are you?!" I yelled, a bit angrily.

He didn't bother to answer. Then he lunged at me, sword drawn and ready to kill. I managed to deflect the blade a few times with my javelin, until I finally threw him back with the

force. Unfortunately, he wasn't ready to go down yet, and I sensed him summoning Psynergy...

"Pyroclasm!!"

This was much stronger than anything I could've expected. The flames completely caught me off-guard, and the last thing I remembered was being slammed up against a tree, which was well over twenty feet away. Luckily, I reoriented myself in time to see him coming at me again and quickly got up, defending myself with the javelin. I tried to attack, but it didn't seem to really much faze him. Then he swung the sword at me again. I quickly blocked it with the javelin, shoving him back again. Again, I asked, "Who the hell are you?! Why are you trying to attack me?!"

Again, he didn't answer. Metal clashed against wood yet again, and yet again he went right back. *Man, how stubborn can this guy be?!* I quickly ducked another attack, finally managing to get a hit in by slamming him in the groin with the javelin. He backed off for a few seconds, then swung the sword up high. I instinctively whipped the javelin up in a defensive stance to prevent my head from getting sliced off...then I realized it was a feint. Barely a half-second after I lifted up the javelin, the blade dipped suddenly, coming up under the javelin to meet its weak point. The wood could stand it anymore. It snapped in half. *Oh, gods...that jerk broke my javelin!! He'll pay for that!!* I ducked out of the way in time before my arm was slashed off and tried an attack of my own...the one that had finished off Judgment. *"OMEGA FLAME!!"*

The white fire once again engulfed my opponent. I sighed in relief, looking at the remaining pieces of the javelin. *Aw, man...how am I gonna fix this? ...Will I have to get a new one? Jeez...I've had this for ages, and it's never come close*

to breaking. Does that mean that it was getting weaker...or that he...? Bah, I'll never be able to tell. Oh well, at least he's gone—

Suddenly, I was slammed into the tree for the second time, only this time I was at the foot of it. I could see a gleam of silver for a split second, then anticipated the cold metal driving into my body...but it didn't come. I blinked and saw that the sword was hovering barely a millimeter above my throat. I didn't dare breathe. Then, my opponent maneuvered the blade so that it was holding up the Azure Flame. *Oh, gods, he better not touch that...* He drew back. I quickly scrambled up, grabbing the pointed half of the javelin. "Where did you get that?" he asked in a low voice, the first words he'd spoken since he attacked me. The voice hauntingly reminded me of someone.

"I...uh...someone gave it to me."

"A merchant?"

"No, of course not. Why do you wanna know?"

"That,"—he pointed the sword at it again—"is a very dangerous object, created of pure Alchemy. Where *exactly* did you get it?"

"Uh..." I reluctantly decided to tell the truth. "I...I won it. At Sol's Contest, in Sol Sanctum."

"And your request was the Azure Flame? Only the past bearers know of it, and they're all dead."

I froze up a little when he mentioned its name. *Only the past bearers know about it...* "How do YOU know about it, then?!"

"I asked first." He eyed the javelin half, still at my side. "That won't do you much good, by the way."

I growled. "All right...I didn't ASK for it...they just gave it to me, as a bonus. Now, how did y—"

"What *did* you request?"

"Hey, I asked first, this time!"

"Answer the question." He stepped closer, the deadly blade ever nearer.

"Uh...I...I wanted my father...to be resurrected..."

"Then he was a bearer."

"Exactly." I subconsciously noticed that the crystal had changed from light blue to dark, burning red. "Uh...I'm pretty sure that...he destroyed it..."

"Then why do you have it?"

"I told you already, they gave it to me! They probably just put it back together—"

"It shattered into more than ten thousand pieces and all of those pieces vanished a second later. You can't tell me they just 'put it back together'."

I paused. "Wait...how do you *know* all this?"

"I was the one who destroyed it."

"Then...then you're..." I froze. *Is this really happening? Is he really my...father? But...why would he try to kill me? Oh, wait, he probably saw that I had the Azure Flame and figured I was up to no good...* "Who...who are you?"

"...My name is Saturos."

I hesitated, then laughed. "Yeah, right. Suuuure. Real funny. Now, be honest."

"You doubt me?" he said icily.

That's when I realized...he wasn't lying. *Wait a minute, wait a minute...this can't make sense! Saturos is dead, right?! So, how did he come back?! He had to have been...oh, gods...this can't be true...* I snarled and looked to the skies. "All right, Ruun, this isn't funny!! ...Hello?!?!"

Only silence answered.

I felt like I could just scream. This was *all* wrong...now, I would've *preferred* that Gareth was my real dad!! No, wait, it had to be coincidence...someone *else* could've done something weird with a Psynergy spell and accidentally brought him back to life, and my *real* dad would still be around Kalay! That *had* to be it!!

That's when I suddenly remembered something...the white streak. After I had killed the Thunder Lizard, it had turned a darker blue than I had ever seen before. And now it was happening again. *Is this some sort of cruel trick?! This can't possibly be true...!!*

~

[A/N: I'm switching to Isaac's POV really quick, mostly since he hasn't been mentioned much in da story yet...]

It was getting to be late evening. Just barely a half-hour before, I saw Kierra storm into Vale, looking like she was ready to rip something into pieces. I considered asking her what was wrong, why she wasn't still in Kalay, then I decided

against it. Of *course* I'd heard of her defeating the Thunder Lizard without any help; back in the Venus Lighthouse, years ago, it took nearly all of us to kill just one, and even then it wasn't an easy task. I didn't want to make her any madder than she already was. It didn't seem very wise.

Still, I hung around the house for a while, trying to remain inconspicuous. It was obvious that Matt and Gareth were somewhere else, because I could hear fighting from inside...

"How could you let him *do* something like that to you?!" yelled Kierra angrily. The voice seemed slightly broken, but full of rage. But why...?

"Kierra, it wasn't like that!" came Jenna's desperate reply. "Please, just hear me out—"

"What's left to hear?! I know enough already, and now because of some stupid mistake, I just resurrected someone who should've stayed dead, whoever he was!!"

"What? Kierra, what are you talking about—"

"Just...just shut *up*, for a second!! This can't be right!" I could easily hear that Kierra was starting to panic, or something...but telling her mother to shut up? I was just as confused as Jenna.

"Kierra...just tell me what's wrong."

"*No!* I...I can't! They...Gareth...and the others...oh, I'm such an *idiot!*"

"Kierra, please, just calm down!"

At that, Kierra stormed out of the house. Luckily, she didn't notice me, but I decided to follow, anyway. Something was

definitely wrong.

~

Stupid! I yelled at myself in my head. *Stupid, stupid, stupid!!*
Once Gareth, or Isaac, or anybody finds out what I've done,
they'll have my skin, I know it!! ...But I can't just keep it a
secret from them forever, can I?? Oh, this is so frustrating!!

I sat down at the foot of a tree some ways away from the general direction of where people lived...and, for one of the very few times in my life, I cried. Things weren't turning out the way I'd hoped them to.

It seemed like I'd been crying for a long time when I noticed someone standing in front of me. It was Isaac. The last person I wanted to run into. I quickly regained my composure, standing up and staring him defiantly in the eye. "What do you want?" I snapped.

"Kierra..." His voice was soft. "What's wrong?"

"...Nothing."

"Yes, there is. I could hear you fighting with your mother. Please, just tell me what's wrong."

I bit my lip. There was something about him that made me want to tell the truth. So I did. I told him about my "adventure" in Sol Sanctum, including the request I made, and the Azure Flame. But I didn't tell him about the results, though, except for the fight. I still didn't tell him who it was. He nodded. "So...I take it that you've met your father?"

I was expecting the question. I looked away. "Yes."

"Today?"

"Yes..."

"...Who is it?"

I was expecting that one, too. But how could I answer him? All in all, it would ultimately reveal the fact that I had accidentally resurrected public enemy #1. "He...he didn't tell me his name."

There was a pause. "Kierra..."

"What?"

He paused again. "Listen... When I first saw you, I could've sworn you were...an incarnation of Saturos, or something."

My eyes snapped up to meet his. That, most certainly, wasn't expected. I remained silent and he continued. "I thought my eyes were deceiving me, but...now I know. You have Jenna's beauty and his skill."

"And his curse," I muttered, brushing back the still-pale-blue lock of hair that had fallen in front of my face. I'd been proud of it before, but now I wanted nothing more than to cut the stupid thing off.

"Like it or not, it can't be changed. ...Besides, Ruun would've turned down your request if she thought it would be a bad idea."

"Looks like she thought wrong, then."

"Would you just keep an open mind?"

"How can I? Not after he..." I faltered. The thought was too sick. "I *know* that my mother would *never* love a man such as him. Never."

"And despite that, she did."

I wasn't taken by complete surprise, but I still wasn't expecting him to answer like that. "How would you know, anyway? How would you know he didn't just want her for his fantasies?"

"I don't. But I do know that she loved him, whether or not he loved her back. At any rate, it doesn't matter now. He's alive."

Then, I became fearful. "Are you...are you angry with me?"

"No, of course not. We don't know if it's anybody's fault, or if he's come back with the intention of harm."

"Harm?! He tried to kill me!!"

"Because he had the same idea who you were as you did him."

"But, still—"

"He stopped as soon as he saw the Azure Flame, didn't he? He wasn't stupid enough to kill the bearer, plus with what he knows now, you should be plenty safe, so long as the other villagers don't find out."

"Yeah, but..." I suddenly realized something. "What about mom?!"

"I have a feeling she'll be safe, too."

I fell silent, trying to think. "...I still don't trust him, though."

"You have reason not to. But don't take it out on your mother, all right?"

"...Right."

"You okay now?" I paused, and nodded. "Good. Go back home...please, try to make amends with your mother."

"You promise not to tell?"

"I won't breathe a word of this to anyone. I promise."

"Thanks." I smiled, gave him a quick hug, and ran off in the direction of the house. Although...I couldn't help but shake off the feeling someone else had been listening to our conversation.